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Lifetime of Ministry

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Recommended Citation

Solomon, Michelle (Cummings), "Lifetime of Ministry" (2018). *Staff Publications*. 99.
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LIFETIME OF MINISTRY

AS TOLD TO MICHELE (CUMMINGS) SOLOMON '91

Throughout its rich 131-year history, Cedarville University has been committed to equipping young people for a lifetime of Gospel impact. Countless alumni have left the comforts of home and security of family to fulfill Christ's commands to go and make disciples of all nations (Matt. 28:19). Cedarville's priority on the Gospel can be seen in the sampling of alumni from each of the past six decades who are serving in full-time missions.

WILLING HEARTS TO SERVE

JIM '61 AND ESTHER '61

How do you sum up 50 years of service? How do you encapsulate 50 years of God's blessings? God has richly blessed His work, and we are so thankful that He has allowed us to have a small part of it.

Jim was born in Africa, where his parents were doing medical missions work. He accepted his father's offer — "If you go to Cedarville, I'll pay your way" — rather than accept an athletic or academic scholarship at a secular university. He planned on becoming a medical doctor and supporting missions. At Cedarville, he was stirred to a deep love for God's Word and a desire to serve, even if he was not admitted to medical school. But God was gracious, and Jim became the first Cedarville College student to be accepted to medical school. Cedarville prepared him well academically and spiritually for the work God would call him to. And it was at Cedarville that he met me (Esther). God had previously called me to missions as a junior high student.

God led us to the Philippines in 1968, where we served until 1998. Jim served as a medical doctor in four hospitals and as a mentor to hospital evangelists. I taught missionary kids — including our own three sons — and assisted hospital outreach workers and led Bible studies with staff members. We saw God's hand of blessing on His work in so many ways. He providentially allowed four hospitals to be built, from providing the land, finances, workers in remote regions, and even providing a lumber company just down the road when it was desperately needed. We felt his constant presence and care during challenging medical emergencies (often as Jim was the only medical doctor around), bouts with malaria, storms at sea, destructive typhoons, and a robbery during a taxi ride.



But, mostly, we have been awed to see God's wonderful work in the hearts of the people!

Since our "retirement," God has provided interesting ways and places to continue serving Him. In a West African village, Jim temporarily replaced the only doctor from 2002–2004. In Outer Mongolia from 2004–2008, God changed our roles to teaching English and Bible. And now these past 10 years we have been together with our son and daughter-in-law (both Cedarville grads in the '90s) in China, where it has been a delightful adventure to witness the awesome work the Father is doing in people's lives.

For the past 50 years, we have delighted in God's guidance, blessing, and care, and He has guided us and poured out his blessing on us. It has truly been our privilege to experience the faithfulness of our Lord in all aspects of life and to see firsthand that His amazing ways are "best" (Isa. 48:17), "perfect" (Ps. 18:30), and — may we add — exciting!

BEYOND WHAT WE ASKED OR IMAGINED

JIM '75 AND RACHEL (MAYO) CHAMBERS '78

Reaching into an untouched territory of Africa was my childhood dream. My husband simply wanted to be used in missions in an everyday way, serving with his hands. We met at Cedarville College in 1974 and there began to plan life together and to prepare for usefulness to God. Whether we were likely candidates for pioneering the Zambian outback is debatable, but God was initiating our story; so, two ordinary people eventually found themselves venturing beyond what they'd asked or ever imagined. That's what happens when ordinary meets God.

We loved Cedarville! It wasn't ordinary. After Jim's graduation, we made the town our home and the local church our own. The spirit at The 'Ville fostered enthusiastic service, imbedded God's truth, and made Christianity observable. Most enduring were the friendships: our professors, classmates, coaches, alumni, and administration. These shared their heart for God and knowledge of Him — beyond the classroom, beyond the years of study, beyond the dorms, oceans, and cultures. When our family of eight left for Africa in July 1992, the prayers and passions of our families, lifelong friends, and church body accompanied us. God had written Cedarville into our story,

The first 11 years, we were part of a church-planting team reaching the Zambian capital of Lusaka. The city was hard-hit by poverty, death, HIV, and disintegrating family units. Church planting did not follow all the textbook rules. We integrated compassion ministries into discipleship, equipping churches to address their own destitute in practical ways.

The next 15 years, God transplanted us into rural soil. We reached into a traditional village through Community Health Evangelism, starting a Bible study and sprouting a church. A polygamist wife attending the group was from the outback. Her eventual conversion and pleas for her family drew us to a remote people group, polygamist families, and hard-core spiritual darkness. What a chapter!



Today, God is still writing the story. Five church plants are just beginning to blossom in the bush, sending out their own gospel runners to new villages. Three of these host Bible literacy schools for their communities. A Christian-staffed clinic shares Jesus' love and a training center His truth. A mature, Zambian missionary oversees this region's development, and a Zambian mission board is the goal of our final page. Cedarville's impact on us is in permanent ink. Its message of Truth is being published, and it remains in each chapter of our lives!



LOVE FOR GOD THAT GROWS, OVERFLOWS

DAVID '82 AND CINDY (ULMER) COX '83

You can't become a missionary simply by crossing the ocean; there must be a love for God that is growing and overflowing into the lives of others right where you are, right now. The only way to love God is to know God's Word and live it. We encourage young people to dig into the Bible daily. As love for God grows, so will love for others. When a missionary understands who he or she is and humbly serves others, living with conviction and compassion, Christ uses his or her life to impact others for His glory.

I (David) grew up in Brazil as a missionary kid and came to Cedarville unsure if I wanted to go back to Brazil — would I just be going home? I considered pursuing business in order to support missionaries financially. But God used men like Paul Dixon, John McGillivray '70, and Don Rickard and experiences on a Swordbearers team and a short-term missions trip to the Ivory Coast to change my thinking and the desire of my heart. A comment by Jean Fisher, a Christian education professor, really convicted me: "Maybe the Brazilian culture and language that God has already given you was to prepare you to go back and serve." My wife, Cindy, and I met my second year at Cedarville. On our first date, I shared my plans to serve in Brazil. The Lord united her heart with mine to go together.

Following graduation, I studied at Dallas Theological Seminary (DTS). After one year at Cedarville, Cindy transferred to another school to obtain her nursing degree. We married in 1983. I graduated from DTS in 1986 and we served at Midlothian Bible Church in Texas for four years. In

June 1990, we began our ministry in Brazil.

We serve with Word of Life Fellowship (WOL) in São Paulo, Brazil. WOL has diverse ministries including a seminary, a one-year discipleship program, a family conference center, youth camp, Bible Clubs to churches, and an afterschool outreach center to needy children. For 15 years we served directly with the seminary. For the last 13 years, we have provided pastoral care to staff members in all ministry areas. This includes counseling, coordinating small groups, discipleship, communication, conflict resolution, encouragement, devotional challenges, and overall staff appreciation and orientation. Mostly we minister to lives, proclaiming the Lord Jesus Christ as we admonish and teach with all wisdom so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ (Col. 1:28). We continue to disciple a group of seminary couples and prioritize involvement in our local church.

What a joy to help prepare men and women to share Christ and to reach others throughout Brazil! Alumni of the seminary serve as pastors, teachers, Christian educators, and missionaries, especially to numerous Indian tribes along the Amazon River. Because Brazil has few political barriers with other countries, Brazilian missionaries can more easily enter countries that would be more difficult for U.S. citizens. We are deeply grateful and blessed to be an integral part of training Brazilians to hold forth Christ to the world.

GOD'S EXTRAVAGANT GRACE POURED OUT

JENNIFER (BENEFIEL) DEKRYGER '93

Extravagant grace — that's what our generous God pours out into the lives of His children who are desperate for Him.

God used Cedarville University as a greenhouse for me to grow in Christ and be prepared to serve overseas. As an education and cross-cultural studies major, God opened doors for me to student teach overseas in Senegal, West Africa. Dr. Merlin Ager '60, then the head of the education department, encouraged me to serve faithfully. He challenged me to not just see my experience as an adventure, but to sincerely serve. Working alongside dedicated missionaries, I was given opportunities to "wash the feet" of others, reluctantly putting my own agenda aside. I returned to the United States with a renewed desire to invest my life in sharing the truth of who Christ is with those who have never heard of the hope we have in Him.

After I married my husband, Todd, we left for Togo, West Africa, to serve with the Association of Baptists for World Evangelism (ABWE) in 2003. As a physician assistant, Todd had a passion to establish a hospital in a very dark place. We worked together for 12 years, along with our four sons, to help build the hospital and prepare it to reach a population where only 1 percent of the people are evangelical Christians. God's extravagant grace was evident with each step. His hand provided the funding for this \$6 million facility. He brought the needed construction teams to Togo. He assembled a committed team of career missionaries to serve in the hospital. On February 26, 2015, our dream became a reality; the hospital opened, and we began treating patients with compassionate care in the name of Jesus.

Exactly one year after the opening, God called Todd home to heaven after a brief illness. As I watched the man whom I had loved and served with for nearly 20 years slip into eternity, I was again covered by God's extravagant grace. I chose to believe that the God who called us to go would continue to be faithful to me and my sons. Todd had fulfilled everything God had for him on this earth, but as long as He gives me breath, I



believe He has called me to speak of His love for us in Christ.

Today, my boys and I continue to serve at the Hospital of Hope in Mango, Togo. God continues to extend His grace to us and is at work each day, sustaining us and opening the eyes of the hearts of our West African friends. Many who have never before heard the name of Jesus spoken are surrendering their hearts to His call of love to them. We as a missionary team strive to be faithful to sow the seeds of truth and to trust the Spirit of God to do the work necessary to call the nations to Himself through this medical ministry. We have seen the platform of medicine open many doors for us as God has allowed us to share the truth about Jesus with our patients.

I have been blessed by God's extravagant grace as He has allowed me to see Him begin to establish His Kingdom in West Africa. There is no life more beautiful and rewarding than a life desperate for the filling and enabling of God that spurs us on to serve others and to share the truth of the Gospel, so as to ultimately see the name of Jesus exalted among the nations.



TREASURE IN JARS OF CLAY

JONATHAN '01 AND NOELLA (FISHER) KLEIS '99

“But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us” (2 Cor. 4:7). The truth of Paul’s word perhaps best sums up our 13 years serving in Italy as full-time missionaries with ABWE. Paul is speaking here of his ministry in which the darkness-dispelling power of the Gospel is manifest in his own weakness, frailty, and suffering. Our ministry has been marked by pain and adversity. We witnessed our first church plant implode and utterly fail for reasons beyond our control. For years, Jonathan has struggled with chronic and debilitating ailments that, on the surface, would appear to severely limit his ability to minister. And yet it has been on account of these trials — not despite them! — that we have seen the Gospel of Christ at work in its most powerful form, both in our lives and in the lives of those to whom we minister.

We came to Italy in 2005, specifically in the area of Turin in the northwestern region of Piedmont. While many think of Italy as devoutly Catholic, very few actually practice their faith, or even have any kind of faith at all. Around 13,000 people live in our community, and the average attendance of Catholic mass on any given Sunday is only around 30 people. This number is indicative of what Italians truly believe and what their spiritual condition is. In reality, secularism and the occult hold far greater power in our area, with Turin being the point of convergence for European white and black magic.

Our ministry is specifically focused on church planting, or better, planting church-planting churches. In other words, we are all about seeing an indigenous church-planting movement come to fruition in which self-sustaining Italian churches are reproducing themselves and multiplying throughout the region. We praise God that, in 2017, we saw a church started in our community, and we are currently pouring our time and energy into discipleship and further evangelism in order that the church may grow in both breadth and depth, always with the goal of seeing this church reproduce itself in the surrounding area.

In this last year and in answer to prayer, God has opened countless doors for the Gospel in our community, and we are confident that He will bring an abundant harvest. Our ministry approach can be summarized simply as pastoring our community. While pastoring is normally considered a work done within the confines of the church, God has led us to see the whole community of the unevangelized as our congregation, and our task is simply to dedicate ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the Word in their midst.

God’s greatest blessing to us in our ministry has been to show us with painful clarity that truly we are only jars of clay, and when we fully embrace this fact and rejoice in our weakness, then we see how great indeed is the power of the love and grace of God in Christ. It is no accident that our most fruitful seasons of ministry have been accompanied by our most trying and difficult circumstances.

SERVING WITH EXCELLENCE

MATT FILLER '16

One thing that stands out from my time at Cedarville is an emphasis of serving with excellence. Cedarville pairs an excellent product with the proper purpose. In the classroom, I didn't just hear that God wanted my best, but also why He wanted my best. It was for the purpose of bringing Him glory, wherever He might end up using me. These principles continue to guide me as I serve in missions.

I am currently a "missionary intern" with Word of Life in Portugal. I've been involved with anything from project planning as we continue to update our property after a wildfire last fall, to helping coordinate a program that we use in public schools and the community that teaches team-building through games. Another part of my role is to prepare for and host outside groups who come to serve with our team during short-term missions trips. I also have the great opportunity to serve my local church by planning events for our young adult ministry. In a country with such a low percentage of Gospel believers, I'm excited to be a part of a ministry that partners with local churches to help reach young people with the truth of God's Word! I am blessed to be involved with a lot of things, and my goal is to do it with excellence for God's glory.

It is amazing to see how God takes our humble efforts to serve Him with excellence and watch Him pour out His blessings. When I first arrived in Portugal, the team was going through a time of great transition, and it was difficult for both new and existing team members. But God — isn't that a great phrase — has been so good to us and continues to bless our ministry.

We have seen the fruit of God working in the hearts and lives of the people here. In early 2017, our team was only consistently involved in about four churches. Now, just a year and a half later, we're in double that number of churches and we're having an impact in more than

20. We had more than 100 additional young people attend our camps in 2017 compared to 2018. And we ran a team-building program in local schools that included about 1,500 students in the last year. These numbers aren't just statistics; they represent individuals whom the Lord has brought into our realm of influence. We can only sit back and praise God for the doors He has opened for us to build relationships with the people in the churches and communities in Portugal.

I will finish my internship next year, and Lord willing, I will become a full-time missionary. I am excited to see how God continues to bless and lead as I seek to serve Him with excellence.



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